



Small Group Study, week commencing 26<sup>th</sup> September 2022

### *For starters*

“[Zedekiah] was not an evil person. There is no evidence that he premeditated wrongdoing. But, and this is the significant fact, neither did he premeditate goodness. And *goodness does not just happen.*” (Eugene H. Peterson, *Run with the Horses*, referring to the reign of the last king of Judah before the destruction of Jerusalem in 586BC).

“The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.” (A popular quote, original source unknown).

Discuss these two quotes. What do you think they mean? Do you agree with them?

### *Introduction*

In the opening verses of 2 Peter, the author has set out the foundation for ‘holy maths’ - that is to say, how we can add to our faith the qualities that he lists in verses 5-7.

We might say that the equation for a fruitful Christian life that he sets out goes like this:

<i>faith + goodness + knowledge + self-control + perseverance + godliness + mutual affection + love (verses 5-7)</i>	=	<i>effective and productive knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (verse 8)</i>
--	---	--

In this study we take a closer look at the first of those qualities: **goodness**.

### *Read*

[2 Peter 1:1-12.](#)

### *Study*

1. What do you think of when you hear the words ‘good’ or ‘goodness’ applied to a person? Phrases like “Goodness, her hair is green!” don’t count!

Small Group Study, week commencing 26<sup>th</sup> September 2022

2. The Greek word used for ‘goodness’ (*aretē*) essentially meant ‘excellence’. If someone or something realised their potential or inherent function, they were said to be ‘excellent’. So, for example, a knife that cut cleanly might be referred to as an excellent knife, and a man who developed his natural talents to become a great runner might be known as an excellent athlete.

How would you describe an excellent

- a) Student?
- b) Parent?
- c) Human being?

3. Describing an excellent student or parent shouldn’t be too difficult if we are clear what their purpose is, such as a “learner” or “someone who nurtures their children”. But what is the purpose of a human being?

4. A very quick Google search of “what is the purpose of a human being?” throws up a number of contradictory answers, such as “survival”, “happiness”, “making connections”. But what does the Bible have to say about it? (*Who knew you were meeting with your group to discuss the meaning of life?!*).

Read the following verses

- Psalm 19:1
- Psalm 150:6
- Isaiah 43:6-7
- Matthew 5:16
- 1 Corinthians 10:31
- Ephesians 1:4-6; 11-12
- 1 Peter 2:9 (the word “praises” in the NIV translates the Greek word *aretē*)

In your own words, based on these verses, what is the purpose of a human being?

5. From the verses you have looked at, it is clear that everything from the skies above (Psalm 19:1) to every living creature below (Psalm 150:6) should declare the praises of God, and most especially his people.

Small Group Study, week commencing 26<sup>th</sup> September 2022

Think about one of the following:

- Your work, paid or unpaid
- Your relationships
- Your use of time and money

How does being clear about your purpose shape “whatever you do” (1 Corinthians 10:31)? What helps you to live purposefully, rather than on automatic pilot? What does excellence look like in that sphere of your life?

6. The Greek word used for ‘goodness’ (*aretē*) occurs in only four places in the New Testament. We have come across three of them (2 Peter 1:3 and 2 Peter 1:5, translated “goodness”; 1 Peter 2:9, translated “praises”). Although it looks like Peter has cornered the market on the use of the word, Paul uses it once too:

“Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable - if anything is **excellent** (*aretē*) or praiseworthy - think about such things” (Philippians 4:8)

Draw up a list of specific, excellent things you will think about this week - one for each day, and commit to thinking about them.

### Prayer

#### Psalm 106

<sup>1</sup> Praise the Lord.

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;  
his love endures for ever.

<sup>2</sup> Who can proclaim the mighty acts of the Lord  
or fully declare his praise?

<sup>3</sup> Blessed are those who act justly,  
who always do what is right.

Turn the words from this psalm into worship and prayer.